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ARIEL PADILLA '08
Contract

Contract: More Fund Comics

As long as human society has existed, there have been some who are willing to fight for the side with the biggest checkbook. Mercenaries have played the game of "checkbook loyalty" for millennia... but every now and then, a merc decides that there are some things more important than money, some things that matter more than the contract.

Is the world ready for a mercenary with honor, a soldier for hire with an ethical compass? Jessie Garrett, the hero of *Contract*, hopes so...

Contract, A First Salvo's premiere three issue limited series, is a noir-esque SF tale of mercenaries who decide that some things can't be bought.

"In *Contract*, we have taken capitalism to the extreme," publisher/creator/co-writer *Garan Madeiros* said. "Almost every service you can think of has been farmed out to the lowest bidder. The future still has governments and a structured society, but as an example, a police or even military force is now a private mercenary company. In this way, we have an unlimited supply if stories to draw on—stories dealing with body guarding, kidnapping, deep space rescues, cyber criminals, space pirates and gangs... all fall under mercenary contracts."

In this mercenary future, Madeiros found echoes of contemporary society. "I wanted a futuristic background, but one that can still resonate with the present so that readers would understand certain cultures at a glance. Many of the settings are simply far future versions of our culture today. It is broad enough to encompass almost any idea we can think of."

Of course, Madeiros can't explore that entire future in one miniseries; instead, he focuses on one corner of this dystopian future, offering intriguing glimpses of the larger world during the course of the story. "*Contract* revolves around a small mercenary company called Stellar Rangers Inc. which is operated by the three main characters: Jessie, Panzer, and Tsumi.

"Jessie is the leader and is everything most Mercs are not. Jessie is the tomboy who blossomed. The child of a single parent home, she worked hard to get where she is without becoming jaded. I wanted a character who people could identify with, someone that they would want to have as a personal friend. I'm tired of seeing heroines with severe attitude problems and chips on their shoulders. Just because a woman is capable and can handle herself doesn't mean she has to be some stone cold witch.

"Panzer is their mechanic and weapons specialist. The 'strong-man' and most merc-minded of the Rangers, he is most likely to point out the more lucrative course of action, not the morally correct one. Panzer has undergone extensive genetic and cybernetic augmentation. Another aspect of his personality is that he loves watching 'old 2D vids' and quoting from them; these one-liners and dialogue bits adds some comedic relief to their very serious lives. The relationship between him and the dry-witted Tsumi is just so much fun to write

"As for Tsumi —well, he's a self admitted underachiever. A lazy slacker with a genius level intellect, he acts as computer specialist and hand-to-hand combat expert. He is the voice of reason and logic for the Stellar Rangers... when his apathy doesn't get in the way. Tsumi tends to avoid situations where he might have to lead, take responsibility or even just be accepted. In addition, Tsumi is a master 'Teralite Channeller.'"

Teralite? What is this Teralite of which Madeiros speaks? "Teralite is a naturally-occurring crystal in the *Contract* universe that can be used to store energy; as a result, it's used in a wide variety of applications from nano-technology to starship propulsion. There are some people who, with training, can draw out and shape the power from raw Teralite, enabling them to perform amazing feats such as telekinesis, energy blasts, force shields and so forth. As a story device, Teralite offers that nice balance between science and the almost-mystical."

Jessie, Panzer, and Tsumi operate in a world driven by the highest bidder. There's a catch, though: Jessie and her team haven't sold out their sense of right and wrong. When they find themselves involved in a corporate kidnapping gone wrong, they soon get in over the heads... and the life of a young girl is jeopardized unless they can take control of the situation and save the young girl from a group of organ-leggers who view the girl as nothing more than a commodity to be bought and sold... and the Stellar Rangers's lives as just part of the closing costs.

While Madeiros has built a strong storyline for the miniseries, he explained that "the thing that is very much a priority to me in *any* story is character. I want people to 'hear' these characters and relate to them. Much too often in comics, one character talks and acts just like another; there is a lack of individuality."

Contract doesn't sacrifice plot for characterization, however. "I was a child of the '80 and early '90's, so I grew up watching movies like ***Predator, Aliens, Conan, Robocop*** and ***Die Hard***, reading Jademan kung fu comics, watching kung fu movies and anime—and of course, button mashing for hours on video games. I wanted to incorporate that same level of fun and excitement in my book that I got from watching, reading, and playing those stories as a kid," Madeiros said. "

RANGER-!? YOU JUST COST YOURSELF A LOAD OF SURCHARGES FOR FLYING OUTTA HERE WITHOUT CLEARANCE!
HOPE YOUR EMAIL EMERGENCY'S WORTH IT!
ROGER, PORT CONTROL. HOPE SO, TOO.
WHAT YOU BREAK MY SHIP, YOU BOUGHT IT, RANGER-!?
WE'LL BREAK ATMO IN TEN MINUTES. WHERE'S PANZER? I TOLD HIM I WAS DOING A HIGH-G TAKE-OFF.
HE WAS HEADED TOWARDS THE KITCHEN.
GRSHH
OH, SCOTT! HOT COFFEE IN MEIN ALARM!
VOOOSH
GRSH

Madeiros has enlisted the aid of a number of talents to bring *Contract* to life. "Our guest artist for *Contract's* first issue is *Dave Ross*. Initially, the first issue was planned as *Contract #0*—a short lead-in to the main story. However, Dave liked the characters and had such a great time with it that we expanded his work into a full first issue.

"We then enlisted *Sal Velluto* (who you probably remember for his run on Marvel's ***Black Panther***) contribute a backup story, as well as *Kevin Sharpe* (whose previous works include Marvel's ***X-Treme X-men***, DC's ***Superman/Batman*** and Crossgen's ***Mystic*** and ***Sigil***.) Kevin has finished a ***Jessie Garrett*** oneshot which looks fantastic, and *Mark McKenna* a veteran inker for over twenty years, will be contributing some of his impressive talent over Kevin's pencils. We're also lucky to have ***Rich Ketcham***—another industry talent whose work is everywhere, including ***Runaways, New Excalibur,*** and more — working with us.

"*Yvel Guichet*, better known for work on Dark Horse's ***Arch-Enemies*** and DC's ***Aquaman,*** has penciled a ***Tsumi*** One-shot, with inks by the legendary *Joe Rubinstein*.

"And last but hardly least, *Ariel Padilla* is taking the reigns as ***Contract's*** series artist. He has really stepped up to the plate, and every time I look at a new page of his, I get chills. He has simple yet very dynamic style that captures some of the manga and anime like qualities that lend themselves so well to ***Contract***."

"I met my co-writer, *Shell*, at the Joe Kubert School; from the time we met, we always wanted to work on a book together. So when we I started talking about ***Contract*** it just flowed. *Shell* brings that much-needed other voice into the story. He has some fantastic ideas, adding a hard science approach to stories that contrasts quite well with my more character-driven style."

A fully mapped out miniseries... spinoff oneshots... it's obvious that Madeiros and the staff of A First Salvo have been working far ahead in preparation for this launch. "Our publishing plan has been in the works for a while now," Madeiros said. "I wanted to have a few issues completed before soliciting in ***Previews***. So, barring some kind of natural disaster or similar, we will most assuredly meet our shipping schedule. Being a small press publisher launching a new book, I wanted retailers as well as consumers to feel comfortable picking up ***Contract;*** I wanted to do what it takes to ensuring that issues will ship on time. Nothing hurts a book like late shipping—something that is, unfortunately, becoming more and more common nowadays. But it's not going to be a problem for us."

"I also wanted both the retailer and the reader to be comfortable in buying the book. I wanted to find a way to engage readers with virtually no risk... With that in mind, I decided on an inexpensive introductory zero issue that would lead into a series of miniseries. That works particularly well for us, since the concept of ***Contract*** is perfectly suited for miniseries and oneshots. Each story explores a contract that the Rangers have been hired to fulfill."

While Madeiros has some other concepts for future series, "I am concentrating on ***Contract*** right now. I want my readers to know that my attention is not being divided. After the first initial mini-series, there will be three oneshots focusing on each of the three main characters. In this way we expand on the world as well as give the character a bit of spotlight to expand on there personality and abilities."

Contract #0, a 25¢ comic, is scheduled for June release. ***Contract #1,*** an extra-length comic priced at $3.99, follows in late July, with the standard-length ***Contract #2*** slated for late August release.

by Cliff Biggers

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

The following comics and comics-related books are tentatively slated for release on the dates given; if no date is given, the books are tentatively scheduled for release sometime in the month of July.

○**100 BULLETS #93** 7/9 Vertigo/DC MAY080255 $2.99
○**1001 ARABIAN NIGHTS: ADVENTURES OF SINBAD #3** Zenescope MAY084243 $2.99
○**2000 AD #1593** 7/2 Rebellion MAY084087 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1594** 7/9 Rebellion MAY084088 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1595** 7/16 Rebellion MAY084089 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1596** 7/23 Rebellion MAY084090 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1597** Rebellion MAY084091 $4.50
○**2000 AD EXTREME ED #30** 7/9 Rebellion MAY084092 $5.99
○**76 #7 (OF 8)** 7/2 Image MAY082191 $2.99
○**A I REVOLUTION GN VOL 5 (OF 17)** Go Media MAY083908 $10.99
○**ABSOLUTE LOEG THE BLACK DOSSIER HC** 7/30 Wildstorm/DC JAN080240 $99.00
○**ACTION COMICS #867** 7/9 DC MAY080180 $2.99
Part 2 of "Brainiac" by Geoff Johns, Gary Frank, & Jon Sibal
○**AFTERBURN #4 (OF 4)** 7/16 Red 5 MAY084096 $2.95
○**AGE OF INSECTS VOL 3: NOT HUMAN** 7/23 Critical Mass MAY083741 $5.99
○**AIR GEAR GN VOL 9** Del Rey MAY083764 $10.95
○**ALBERT EINSTEIN GN: BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS** Simon & Schuster MAY084110 $7.99
○**ALETHEIA #3 (OF 3)** 7/23 Image MAY082192 $3.50
○**ALIENS OMNIBUS TP VOL 4** 7/9 Dark Horse MAR080070 $24.95
○**ALL NEW ATOM #25** 7/2 DC MAY080185 $2.99
○**ALL STAR BATMAN & ROBIN THE BOY WONDER #10** 7/16 DC FEB080203 $2.99
○**ALTER EGO #79** 7/9 TwoMorrows MAY084245 $6.95
Spotlighting Superman and his creators
○**AMAZING SPIDER MAN: ONE MORE DAY SGN SET** DF MAY083855 $149.99
○**AMAZING SPIDER-GIRL #22** 7/9 Marvel MAY082262 $2.99
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○**AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #565** 7/9 Marvel MAY082259 $2.99
She's Spider-Man's newest and most terrifying nemesis — and she just discovered his secret identity…
○**AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #566** 7/16 Marvel MAY082260 $2.99
○**AMBUSH BUG: YEAR NONE #1 (OF 6)** 7/23 DC MAY080148 $2.99
Da Bug is back, courtesy of Keith Giffen, Robert Loren Fleming, & Al Milgrom

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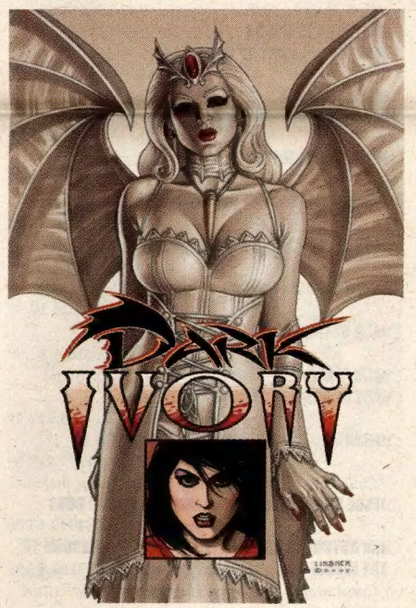

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Four intergalactic female bounty hunters pursue an elusive prey

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○**JENNA JAMESON'S SHADOW HUNTER HC VOL 1** 7/16 Virgin MAY084179 $19.99

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○**JIM BUTCHERS DRESDEN FILES #4 (OF 4): WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE** 7/23 Dabel MAY083762 $3.99

Concluding the original Harry Dresden adventure by Jim Butcher

○**JLA TROPHY ROOM JOKER CANE PROP REPLICA** 7/30 DC Direct DEC070317 $295.00

Life-sized, high-quality, mixed-media replica features a metal Joker head handle! The two-piece solid wood staff section features varnished card suits, and the metal tip hides a Joker 'gas nozzle,' activated by a twist of the wrist! Packaged in an upscale box, this prop measures 37.25' long and includes a metal wall display shelf

○**JOKER'S ASYLUM: POISON IVY #1** 7/16 DC MAY080167 $2.99

JT Krul & Guillem March focus on Poison Ivy's criminal career

○**JOKER'S ASYLUM: SCARECROW #1** 7/23 DC MAY080168 $2.99

Joe Harris & Juan Doe spotlight the career of the Scarecrow

○**JOKER'S ASYLUM: THE JOKER #1** 7/2 DC MAY080165 $2.99

Arvid Nelson & Alex Sanchez offer an inside look into the life of the Joker

○**JOKER'S ASYLUM: THE PENGUIN #1** 7/9 DC MAY080166 $2.99

Jason Aaron & jason Pearson offer an inside look into the life of the Penguin

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David Hine & Andy Clarke reveal Two-Face's secrets

○**JONAH HEX #33** 7/2 DC MAY080196 $2.99

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Collecting the Wilderness adventures of Wolverine McAlistaire by William Messner-Loebs

○**JUDGE DREDD MEGAZINE #274** 7/23 Rebellion MAY084093 $7.50

○**JUGHEAD #190** 7/30 Archie MAY083611 $2.25

○**JUGHEADS DOUBLE DIGEST #142** 7/23 Archie MAY083610 $3.69

○**JUNGLE GIRL HC VOL 1** Dynamite MAY083752 $19.99

○**JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #23** 7/23 DC MAY080199 $2.99

Wonder Woman vs. Amazo

○**JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA #17** 7/2 DC APR080216 $2.99

In Part 2 of 'Gog,' the Justice Society of America is split down the middle as their allegiance to the being known as Gog has disrupted the team. Are Gog's motives on the level, or is it all some insidious plot to destroy mankind?

○**JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA ANNUAL #1** 7/30 DC MAY080200 $3.99

Geoff Johns, Alex Ross, & Jerry Ordway say 'Welcome to Earth-2!' Power Girl has made a life for herself on our world, as a member and chairwoman of the Justice Society of America and as a hero in her own right. But she's never stopped dreaming of one day returning to her Earth - the parallel world where the members of the Justice Society were the only heroes. Where her best friend was Helena Wayne, the daughter of Batman. And where evil was a little easier to fight wasn't it? As her greatest wish comes true, Power Girl's about to find herself back on Earth-2, surrounded by friends she thought she'd lost forever

○**JYU OH SEI GN** TokyoPop MAY084125 $14.99

○**KAGETORA GN VOL 10** 7/9 Del Rey APR083729 $10.95

○**KAMISAMA KAZOKU GN VOL 2** Go Media MAY083910 $10.99

○**KAZE NO HANA TP VOL 2** 7/23 Yen MAY084237 $10.99

○**KICK ASS #4** 7/9 Marvel MAX MAR082250 $2.99

○**KIICHI AND THE MAGIC BOOKS VOL 2** 7/23 CMX/DC APR080289 $9.99

○**KIKAIDER CODE 02 VOL 7** 7/9 CMX/DC APR080285 $9.99

○**KILLERS #2 (OF 4)** Atlas MAY083627 $2.99

○**KING OF THORN GN VOL 5 (OF 6)** TokyoPop MAY084140 $9.99

○**KISS 4K: LEGENDS NEVER DIE TP** Platinum MAY084081 $19.99

○**KISS BLUE GN VOL 1 (OF 2)** 7/9 Digital Manga MAY083816 $12.95

○**KNIGHTS GN VOL 1 (OF 2)** 7/23 Digital Manga MAY083809 $9.95

KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE #141 Kenzer & Co. MAY084024 $4.99

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Matt Wagner & Amy Reeder Hadley continue to unravel the mystery behind Madame Xanadu's past and future

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Featuring a heaping helping of crime comics from Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Will Eisner, Max Allan Collins, Alex Toth, and many others

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Jason McNamara, Paige Braddock & Brian Miller present an SF story following redneck outlaws on Mars... humanity's last hope!

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MARVEL PREVIEWS AUGUST 2008 7/30 Marvel JUN080002 $0.99

Spotlighting October releases

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MICE TEMPLAR #6 7/30 Image MAY082208 $2.99

MIDDLEMAN COLLECTED SERIES: INDISPENSABILITY COMPENDIUM SC Viper MAY084177 $19.95

MIGHTY AVENGERS #16 7/16 Marvel MAY082304 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

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Collects Mighty Avengers #s 7-12

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MODESTY BLAISE TP VOL 15: GREEN COBRA Titan MAY084118 $19.95

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MOON KNIGHT #20 7/16 Marvel MAY082291 $3.99

MORESUKINE GN 7/30 NBM MAY084052 $15.95

MS MARVEL #29 SI 7/23 Marvel MAY082313 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

MS MARVEL TP VOL 4: MONSTER SMASH 7/9 Marvel MAY082379 $14.99

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MUMMY MOVIE PREQUEL: RISE & FALL OF XANGOS AX #4 IDW MAY083964 $3.99

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MYSTERIANS GN VOL 1 (OF 3) TokyoPop MAY084132 $9.99

MYTH OF 8 OPUS PROLOGUE EXPANDED ED GN A-Okay MAY083587 $14.99

MYTH TOLD TALES #1: MYTH CONGENIALITY Silver Phoenix MAY084109 $3.95

NANA TP VOL 11 7/2 Viz APR084216 $8.99

NARUTO TP VOL 30 7/2 Viz APR084200 $7.95

NEARLY INFAMOUS ZANGO #3 Absolute Tyrant MAY083528 $3.50

NEIL GAIMAN'S CORALINE GN 7/2 Harper Collins MAY083918 $18.99

Graphic novel by Neil Gaiman & P. Craig Russell

NEW AVENGERS #43 SI 7/23 Marvel MAY082305 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

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NEW DYNAMIX #4 (OF 5) 7/2 WildStorm/DC MAY080242 $2.99

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NEW EXILES #8 7/9 Marvel MAY082334 $2.99

NEW WARRIORS #14 SI 7/23 Marvel MAY082315 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

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Brian Wood & Ryan Kelly present the ultimate insider's guide to NYC as seen through the eyes of Brooklyn-born Riley

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1959 is the dawn of the new age of superheroics-the so-called 'Fireworks' have granted superhuman powers to three Americans, and set the world on a collision-course with destiny. But it's a destiny Philip Voight must prevent at any cost.

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PILOT SEASON: URBAN MYTHS #1 7/30 Image MAY082231 $3.99

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POWERS HC VOL 02: DEFINITIVE COLLECTION 7/23 Icon/Marvel OCT072157 $29.99

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PUNISHER #59 7/16 Marvel MAX MAY082344 $2.99

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PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #21 7/2 Marvel MAY082295 $2.99

PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL TP VOL 3: HUNTER/HUNTED 7/16 Marvel MAY082378 $14.99

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Marc Hansen relaunches his famous creation

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It's all-out war for control of hell! This is the major event that changes the status quo for DC's infernal realm as Lord Satanus sets out to dethrone Neron at all costs

ROADKILL ZOO GN Novaris MAY084058 $15.00

ROBIN #176 7/16 DC MAY080178 $2.99

Batman RIP tie-in

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SA GN VOL 5 7/2 Viz APR084218 $8.99

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SECRET HISTORY OF THE AUTHORITY: JACK HAWKSMOOR #5 (OF 6) 7/23 WildStorm/DC MAY080249 $2.99

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Expanded version of Secret Invasion #1, with sketches, script, and more

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SECRET INVASION #4 EXCLUSIVE ALTERNATE SGN CVR DF MAY083849 $29.99

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he world has turned upside down! The Skrulls have taken the Earth as part of their empire, the Avengers and Initiative are scattered...but there are two people who want some answers. One has a hammer and one has a shield. And Brian Bendis & Leinil Yu are about to introduce you to them...

SECRET INVASION: FANTASTIC FOUR #3 (OF 3) SI 7/9 Marvel MAY082309 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

SECRET INVASION: FRONT LINE #1 (OF 5) SI 7/2 Marvel MAY082307 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

SECRET INVASION: FRONT LINE #1 SGN DF MAY083850 $29.99

SECRET INVASION: RUNAWAYS/YOUNG AVENGERS #2 (OF 3) SI 7/16 Marvel MAY082308 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

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SHE-HULK 2 #31 SI 7/23 Marvel MAY082317 $2.99

Secret Invasion tie-in

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SHIRLEY 7/2 CMX/DC APR080284 $9.99

SHOJO BEAT AUGUST 08 7/16 Viz APR084196 $5.99

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SHOWCASE PRESENTS BATMAN TP VOL 3 7/2 DC MAR080193 $16.99

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SHOWCASE PRESENTS HAWKMAN TP VOL 2 7/16 DC APR080237 $16.99

Collecting Hawkman #s 12-27, Atom & Hawkman #s 39-45, Atom #31, and Brave & Bold #70

SHOWCASE PRESENTS HOUSE OF SECRETS TP VOL 1 7/30 DC APR080238 $16.99

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SIMPSONS CLASSICS #17 Bongo MAY083674 $3.99

SIMPSONS COMICS #144 Bongo MAY083675 $2.99

SKAAR, SON OF HULK #2 7/30 Marvel MAY082276 $2.99

SKETCH MAGAZINE #37 Blue Line MAY083666 $6.95

SKIP BEAT TP VOL 13 7/2 Viz APR084219 $8.99

SKRULLS 7/9 Marvel MAY082319 $4.99

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Skrulls impersonate Marvel's premiere all-kids super hero team, commit crimes around the universe in their form, so intergalactic bounty hunters capture and imprison Alex, Julie, Jack and Katie in Space Juvie...the dreaded reform-school planet Hadith-VI!

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SNAKED TP IDW MAY083983 $17.99

SOLA GN VOL 1 7/2 Broccoli APR083667 $10.99

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Omega Team is the elite division of Spooks - the baddest of the bad. This special preview takes them to

the jungles of South America to investigate rumors of tribal voodoo & zombie slaves

SQUADRON SUPREME 2 #1 7/2 Marvel MAY082320 $2.99

Howard Chaykin & Marco Turini relaunch the Squadron Supreme

SQUADRON SUPREME 2 #1 SGN DF MAY083851 $19.99

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STEAL MOON GN VOL 1 (OF 2) 7/23 Digital Manga MAY083810 $12.95

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STRAWBERRY 100 % TP VOL 5 7/2 Viz APR084212 $7.99

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SUPERGIRL #31 7/2 DC MAY080183 $2.99

Where does Supergirl go now that her relationship with Superman is shattered?

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SWORD OF RED SONJA: DOOM OF THE GODS TP Dynamite APR083709 $14.99
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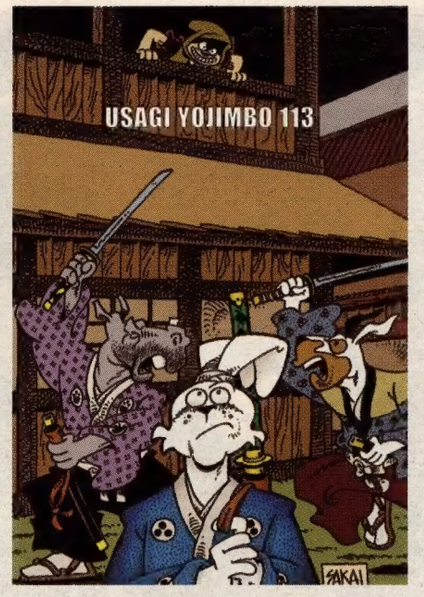

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